

ULI Boston Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program

Farmington Avenue Corridor



Mission

To provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

ULI is a research and education institution with over 35,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service.

ULI at the local level

- Boston District Council covers nearly all of New England
- 1,100 Members—developers, architects, planners, public officials, financiers, students, etc.

Emphasis on sharing best practices and providing outreach to community

- Over 2,000 attendees last year
- UrbanPlan High School Program
- Technical Assistance Panels
- Trends in Real Estate Conference

City of Hartford, CT

ULI Boston is committed to supporting the communities of New England in making sound land use decisions and creating better places. A Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) brings together a group of ULI members with a range of professional expertise to provide focused, collaborative consultation to a local government or qualifying non-profit organization.

This TAP

- Sponsored by the City of Hartford
- This panel looked at the full range of options from an unbiased perspective.
- Panelists include experts in the fields of architecture, development, engineering, law, investment and construction.
- Panelists have donated their time
- Final Deliverable – Written report (within 6 weeks) will be available at <http://boston.uli.org>

TAP Panelists

TAP Co-Chairs

Richard Lampman – G. Greene Construction

Larry Spang - Arrowstreet

TAP Panelists

Kwesi Brown - Milone & MacBroom

Jason Denoncourt - The Gutierrez Company

R. Michael Goman - Goman + York Property Advisors

Anika Lemar - Wiggin & Dana

Rai Muhlbauer - BL Companies

James Perrine - The Community Builders, Inc.

Doug Poutasse - Bentall Kennedy

Virginia Quinn – Report Writer

Michelle Landers – ULI Boston

The Panel's Assignment

Evaluate existing commercial areas on the Farmington Avenue corridor, identify specific areas and needs, and recommend strategies or policies that will reduce commercial vacancy rates, strengthen the corridor, and create the environment that allows the type of commercial development that will complement Farmington Avenue.



The Panel's Assignment

Questions To Be Considered

1. What are the marketing opportunities for commercial and retail uses along Farmington Avenue?
2. What strategies or policies can the city employ to strengthen the commercial aspect of the corridor?
3. How do we look the different sections of Farmington Avenue and establish connections throughout and with the Downtown?
4. What infrastructure improvements may be necessary to attract businesses to underutilized commercial areas?
5. What design characteristics should be used to enhance commercial development?
6. What public or private financing tools are available to encourage or fund investments in the area?
7. What are the needs of existing retail businesses on the corridor?
8. What types of retail are appropriate for each section of Farmington Avenue?
9. What is the best first step?
10. What are realistic time frames to accomplish the recommended development scenarios?

The Process

Site Visit:

- Bus tour of Farmington Avenue, West End Neighborhood and Asylum Hill Neighborhood



The Process

Panel interviewed stakeholders today including:

- Local Small Employers
- Local Large Employers
- Asylum Hill Neighborhood residents and employees
- City Planning Staff
- West End Neighborhood Residents
- Hartford Law Enforcement



What We Heard

Characteristics and Opportunities

- Historical neighborhood
- Situated between West Hartford center and downtown – two centers of employment, entertainment and retail
- People drive through
- Strong neighborhood support
- The Hartford: 5000 employees on the campus – one building on Farmington Avenue and rest on Asylum
 - 100 employees live in city, 100 use transit
- Immigrant/refugee flow coming in and creating opportunities for economic development
- Young people are moving in and want to be as close to the West End as possible
- Can walk from Ashley Street to downtown in 20 minutes
- Contrasting quality between residential and the commercial on the Avenue itself
- West End is diverse; decent number of renters; very stable; most destabilizing influence is Farmington Avenue itself

What We Heard

Characteristics and **Opportunities**

- Crime prevention through environmental design
 - Police attended LISC training in New Haven with members of the NRZ and NINA
- Perception worse than reality; employees won't stop at Dunkin Donuts for coffee
- Lots of professionals
- Apartments downtown are filled but are also astronomically expensive
- Can walk downtown from Ashley Street 20 minutes from downtown
- South Marshall and Sisson Avenue are keys
- Some private developers are eager to act if improved
 - Owners of FedEx property would like to further develop that property;
 - CVS across the street would like to make a bigger CVS
- Economy affected things
 - condominium/luxury plan at Farmington and Girard didn't work at that site (purchased in 2008)
 - vacant lot behind FedEx plaza (staging plan for MDC project) zoned R7 (single family housing) – developers proposed garden apartments and ZBA turned them down despite neighborhood support

Transportation

- Major arterial but reconstruction has caused some diversion already
- Need transit improvements
- Parking is a problem if you want to use businesses (i.e. dry cleaners)
- Biking in Hartford is unsafe – consider bike lanes, rather than median
- Pedestrian and vehicular flows are bad: Cross at your own risk

What We Heard

Branding and Streetscape

- Encourage commuters to stop at businesses along the way
- Need a reason to stop
- Need to brand Hartford because that's where folks are coming in
- Need new intersections, lighting, street furniture, paving, bus shelters, etc.
- Need to be more consistent looking
- Need to build on local planning
- Newly renovated apartment building at corner of Sigourney and Farmington but biggest sign is "FOR RENT"
- Pedestrian friendly streetscape; need different mix of retail
- Building setback line set long ago and it is far back from the street
- No shared parking regulations
- Opportunity: uncovered the trolley tracks in the street
 - Need to get that rail preserved and part of the street infrastructure

What We Heard

Obstacles

- Property taxes are high
- Halfway houses; lots of subsidized housing
 - 25% of Asylum Hill units are subsidized
- Quality of life issues are the biggest issue
- Perception worse than reality; won't stop at Dunkin Donuts for coffee
- Young employees live in West Hartford
- Community group acknowledged that it may be part of the problem: City went and did Albany Avenue and Park Street – no one showed up to complain about an individual bump out, for example; took 2 years to do construction drawings in early 2000's partly because of neighborhood input

Strategy Suggestions

- Need active support/intervention for new businesses
- Rest of Farmington Avenue has expressed desire for BID to extend services
- Get on with it: we started planning before West Hartford and they just went ahead and did it
- MDC: 2014/2034

Observations

There are at least four different segments of Farmington Avenue within our target area.

1. Union Station to Flower Street (the “Wasteland”)
2. Flower Street to Gillet Street
3. Gillet Street to Sisson Avenue
4. Sisson Avenue to Prospect Street

These four different segments should share a common streetscape, theme and branding identity, but otherwise their needs are very different.

What are our goals?

Retail should both serve as a “destination” and also serve local residents. Given difficult traffic patterns and wide availability of convenient retail in surrounding suburbs, creating commuter-friendly retail is probably not feasible and should not be a priority.

Commercial uses on Farmington Avenue should be accessible on foot, on bike, or by car.

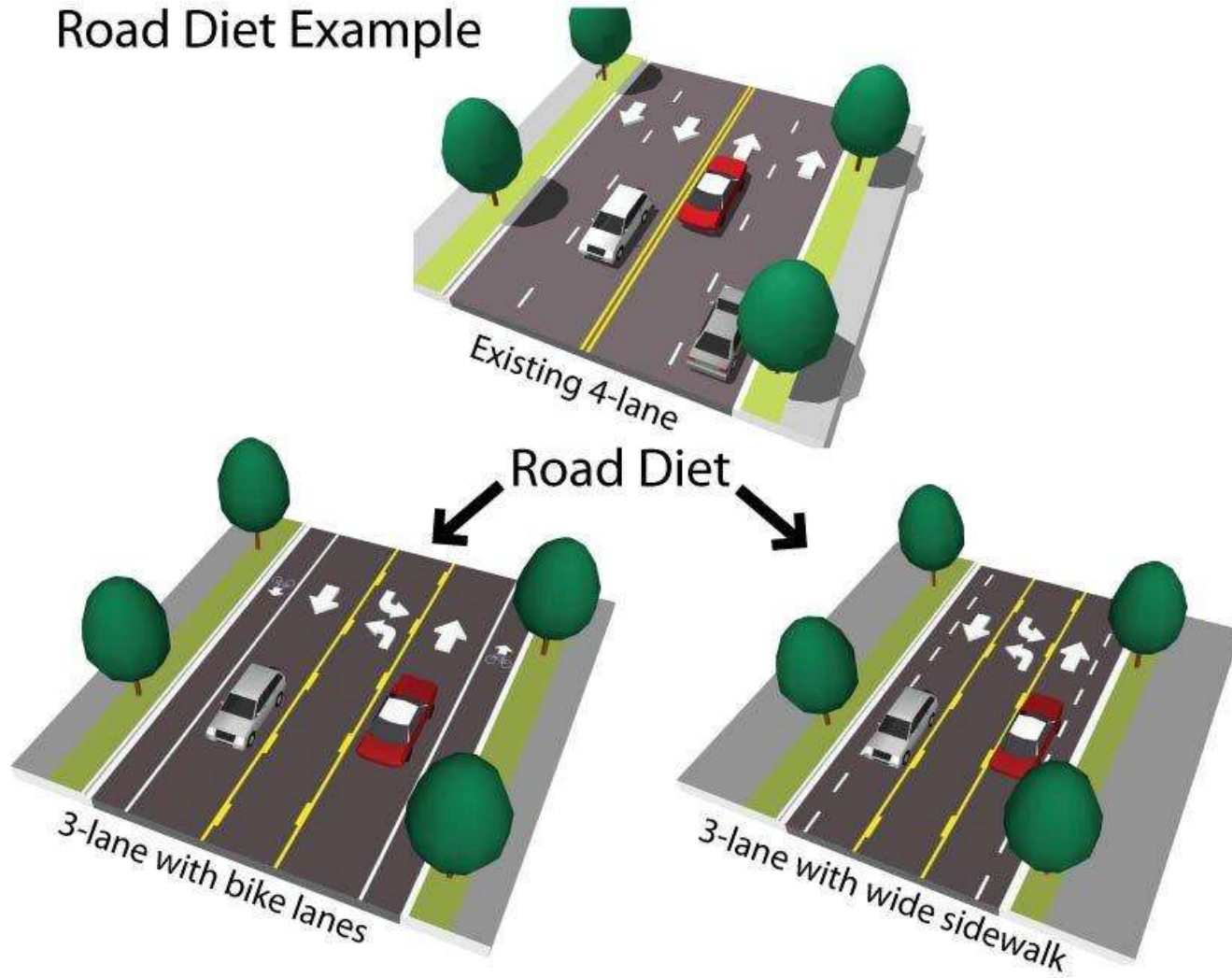
What are obstacles to those goals?

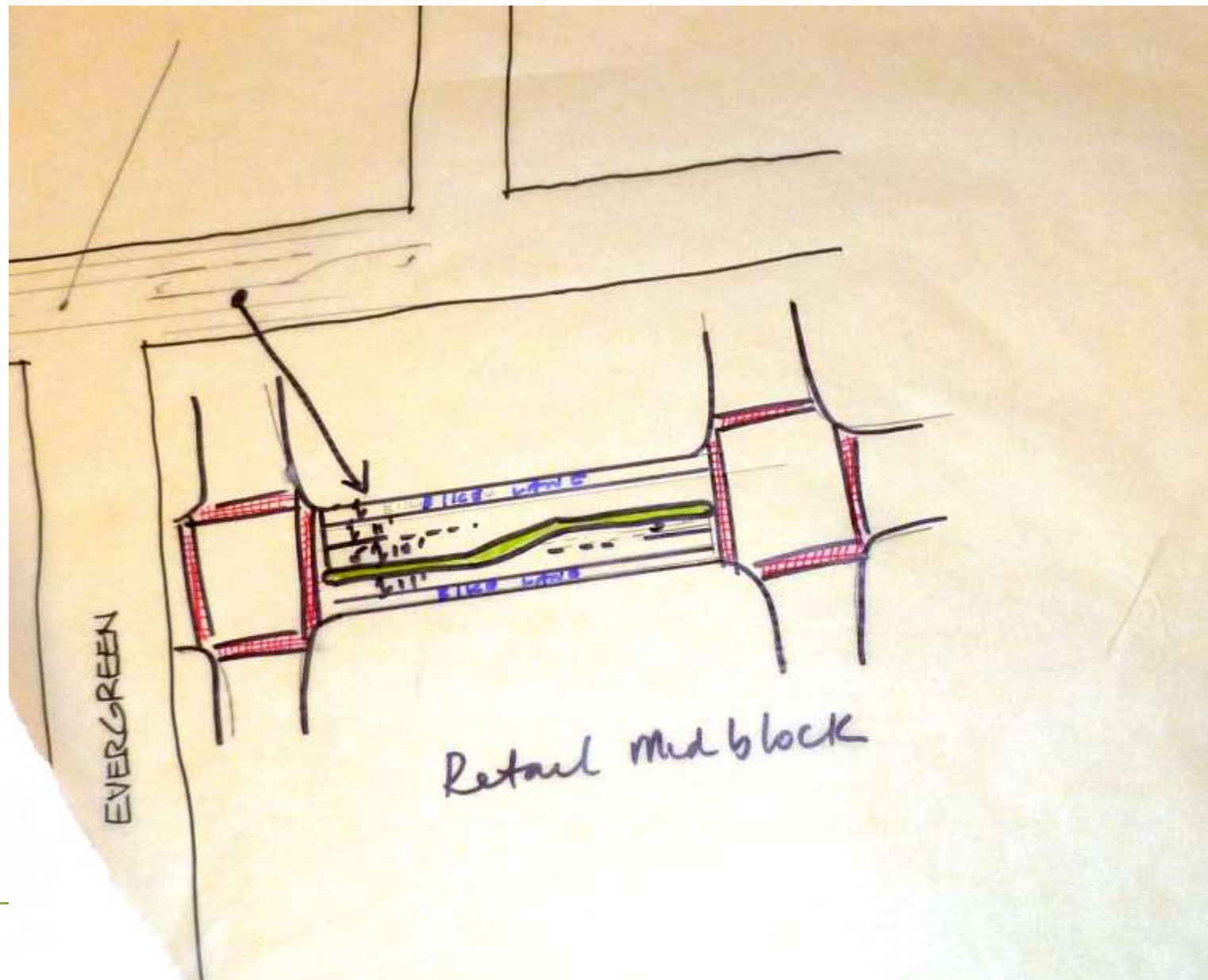
- Quality of life issues
 - Loitering, public drinking
 - Concentration of subsidized housing and social service uses
- Crime and perception of crime
- Haphazard zoning and archaic setback requirements
- Lack of parking and no regulations permitting shared parking
- Lack of cohesive identity on Farmington Avenue

Transportation opportunities

- Infrastructure can improve public safety perception and reality
 - Complete Streets Approach
 - Calm Traffic and not diminish capacity
 - Attractive to pedestrians and bicyclists

Road Diet Example





EVERGREEN

Retail midblock

11'5" - 12'0" WALKWAY

11'5" - 12'0" WALKWAY

Pedestrians

Improving the streetscape to be more pedestrian-friendly

- MDC construction has already slowed and diverted traffic
- Post-construction, streetscape improvements should continue to slow traffic in an effort to encourage neighborhood retail

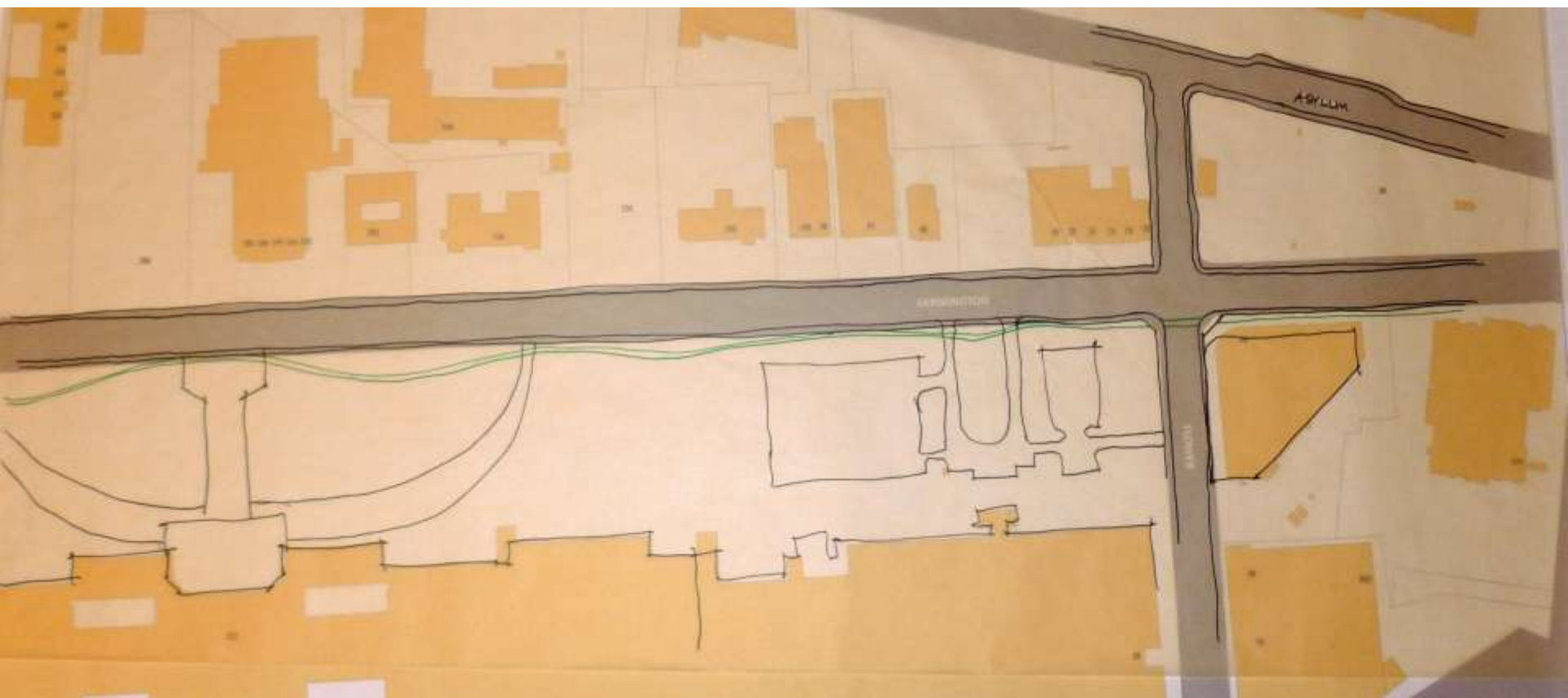


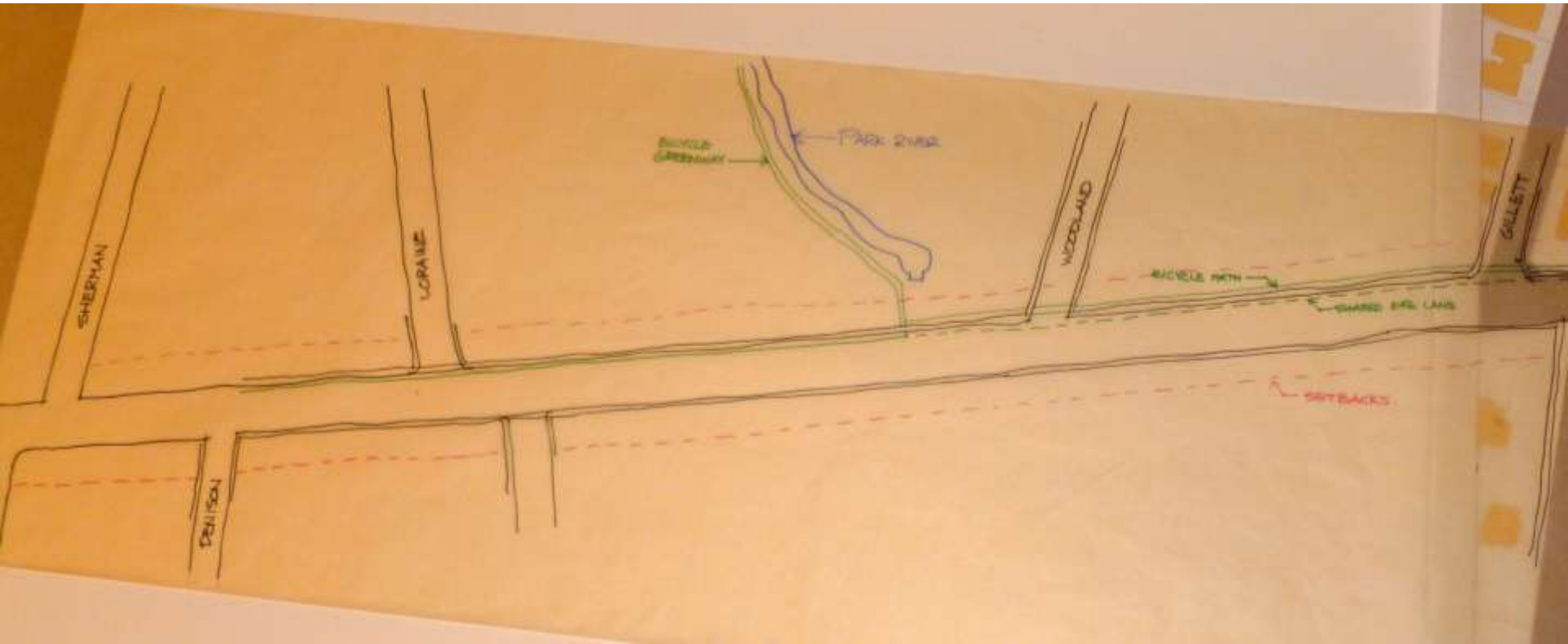
Bicycle infrastructure

- Making Farmington Avenue bike friendly
- Create a pedestrian-friendly and bike-friendly greenway in the Park River Watershed



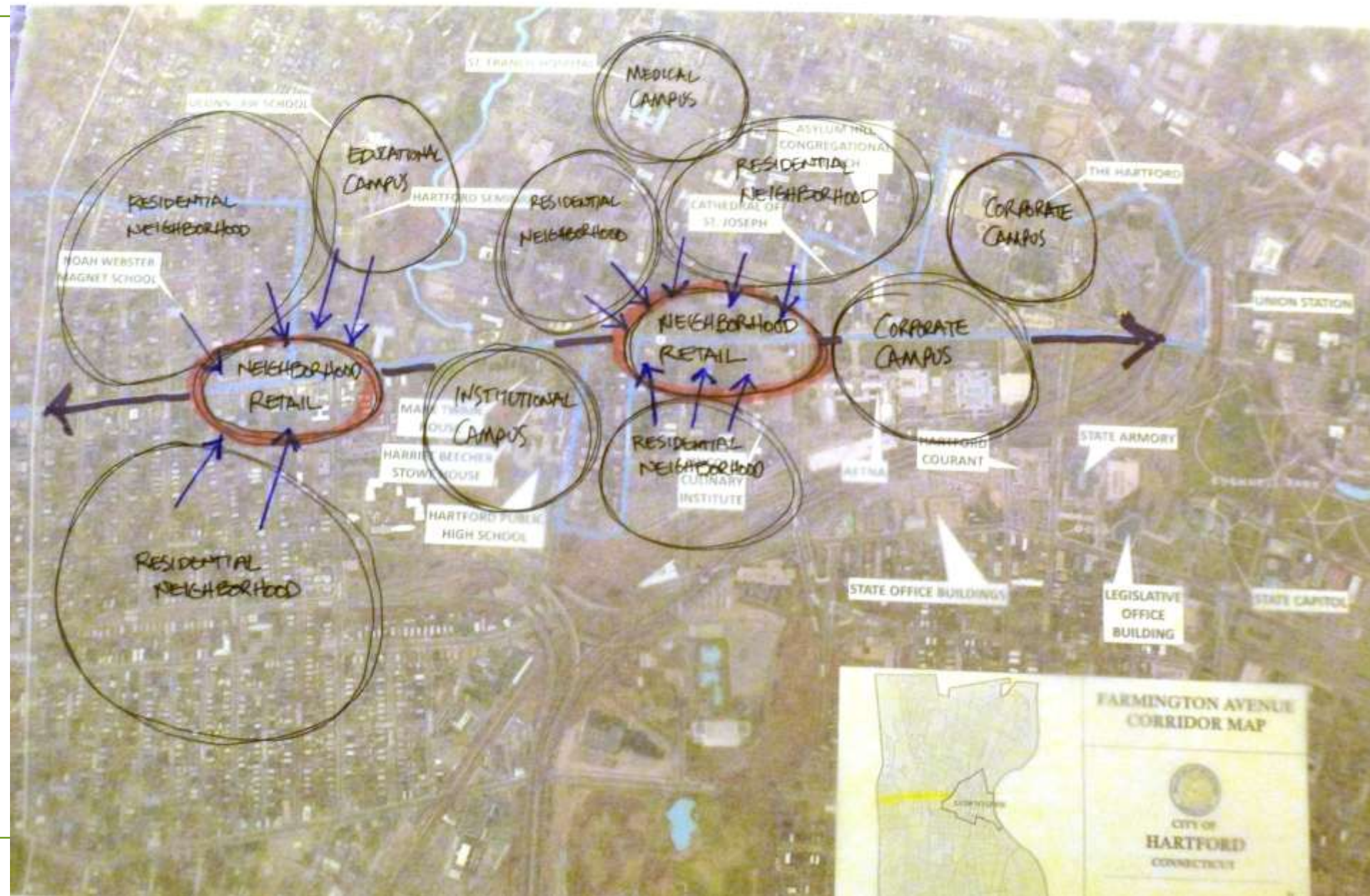






Commercial / Retail opportunities

- Brand Farmington Avenue Corridor as a historic happening neighborhood
- Destination restaurants and bars
 - Medical office space
 - Capitalize on proximity of hospitals and elderly housing complexes
- Create a new Business Improvement District / Special Services District for the Farmington Avenue Corridor





Strategies

- Focus Investments on Retail Centers
 - Marshal > Sigourney – Community Policing
 - Sisson > Whitney – Traffic/Parking Improvements
- Transportation
 - Bikeway Network – Widen Sidewalk
 - Riverway
- Branding/Marketing
 - Signage
 - Lighting
 - Sidewalk/Landscaping
- Business Improvement District

First Steps

Improve Safety Perceptions

- Landlords – Intensive Management
- Community Policing – Foot Patrols, Outreach
- Job Connections Training and Support
 - Connect High School and Farmington Merchants
 - CT Retail Merchants Association

First Steps

- Curb Appeal Improvements “Crime prevention through environmental design”
 - Landscaping, Façade Improvements, Lighting, Banners/Signage
- Activate Empty Lot – Food Trucks? Farmers Market? Flea Market?
- SIB/BID

Questions?

Questions?

Thank you to:

- The City of Hartford Planning Department
- The Hartford
- Aetna